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LOCAL AND ORGANIC FOOD AND FARMING AROUND THE BALTIC SEA

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DISCUSSION

- Cooperation in local organic food systems

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Chapters 3–9 not only describe different cases, the authors look at them from different perspectives as well. Therefore any comparison in a strict sense of the word is hardly possible. Rather, the heterogeneity of the cases and the varied perspectives with which they have been documented are there to be enjoyed. Although different, they still illustrate some commonalities that well suit the purpose of giving ideas or questions for further studies and actions. Below, the topic of what is needed for local food systems to emerge is discussed and this is related to concrete ideas about ways of enhancing cooperation. These interesting examples are picked up from the local and organic food chains and systems of the cases around the Baltic Sea. At the end some issues for further studies in the field of local producer-consumer cooperation are raised.

What is needed for local food systems to emerge? First, *time*. It is most likely that the processes towards local food systems are slow. Juva in Finland has a history in organic agriculture for more than 20 years, and what is seen in Järna is a result of more than 40 years of work. A project of three years can do something of course, but it is a relatively short period of time. Sometimes initiatives or activities done today may yield positive outcome only after years to come. So we need to be patient!

Second, *active people* are needed. None of the cases involved in BERAS would have been possible without local people who worked to create marketing channels for local and organic products. In Kluczbork and Zbiczno municipalities in Poland active farmer couples, Janusz and Iwona Śliczni, and Mieczyslaw and Aleksandra Babalscy have been important driving forces for the local and organic initiatives. In Solmarka, Sweden, Hugo Johansson was the person to change the management of the farm into biodynamic production. Above all, these cases tell about the *necessity and importance of cooperation* and connection between different actors such as farmers, retailers and consumers.

In order to be sustainable local and ecological food chains need to be, at least to some extent, *economically profitable*. Local and organic food is mostly based on relatively small rural enterprises. The question of a suitable scale or the amount of production and processing is often discussed with local and organic food. There needs to be enough demand and customers, and therefore big cities or other sites of consumption nearby may help build local food systems. This is seen in Järna where the local actors recognize Stockholm and its farmers' markets as useful for the marketing, and in Bioranch Zempow where the most demand for organic beef exists in Berlin. The box scheme as presented in Nørregaard, Denmark, allows deliveries to outside the local area. By

increasing the scale it is possible, to some extent, to lower the price, which often is a barrier for buying local and organic for municipal kitchens or consumers. The increase in scale emphasizes the need for cooperation among producers.

There are many other factors affecting the functioning of local and organic food systems. The natural resources enable what can be done and also set limits. For instance clay soils make it difficult to produce root crops and vegetables on a large scale. Laws and regulations also affect food systems. Often food processing regulations are made with big companies in mind. As a result they often present obstacles to small-scale food processing. For small enterprises, the fulfilling of these requirements may entail economic and work time resources that are not available. For the marketing of dairy products in Pahkla Camphill Village, Estonia, new expensive processing facilities are needed to fulfil the hygiene regulations. One of the aims in BERAS project is to reveal these and other types of obstacles, and inform and discuss with administrative officials the possibilities to further develop the regulations and administrative practices.

Despite these factors there is a lot that can be done and cooperation between producers, shopkeepers, advisors and many others is central. Cooperation is probably the only way the transformation to local organic food systems can take place. How significant the transformation is depends on the historically-rooted circumstances in each case. Environmental concerns such as in Bioranch Zempow, Germany, or desires to strengthen local identities and innovation, questions of rural entrepreneurship and development, or many other purposes can fuel meetings, face-to-face interactions and other forms of communication between farmers, processors, consumers and others. In cooperation different actors recognize and regard each other as important and useful resources. The formation of a local organic food system requires that people find *new purposes and objects* (Engeström et al. 2003) for their activities: this means that both individuals and collective groups find new answers to the questions for whom and why food is produced, processed and delivered, and what the consequences of production and consumption are. The common consciousness in the food system of Järna, Sweden, most likely manifests such a collective object.

Cooperation and interaction is indispensable in developing new purposes and practices for food systems. It is the heterogeneity of the actors such as farmers, processors, consumers and others that enables the possibility to mutually benefit each other. With cooperation new relations are formed which strengthen and modify further the building of the food systems.

Shared spaces or instruments, or "boundary objects" (Star 1989), which help various actors, are needed for collaborative food systems. Devices in logistics, timetables for deliveries, agreements, letters mediating information from farmers to customers as in Nørregaard, Denmark, or experimental kitchens where new products can be developed, as in

Juva, Finland, are examples of such instruments. It is useful to enhance shared instruments and spaces for the formation and maintenance of food chains and systems.

The relations of cooperation within local food systems may have a special character. Offer (1997) uses the notion of "economy of *regard*" when referring to the transfer of goods without the benefit of markets or prices. It means that the preference for reciprocal exchange "arises from the intrinsic benefits of social and personal interaction, from the satisfactions of regard...[and is]...preferred when trade involves a personal interaction, and when goods and services are unique, expensive, or have many dimensions of quality" (Offer, 1997, p. 450). Organic local food indeed has many qualities, is often unique and more expensive than the conventional mass products. *Regard* may take many forms such as acknowledgement, respect, status, power and friendship. In the context of local food chains the notion of *regard* would imply that cooperation is not only an instrumental means for building or maintaining flows of food: cooperation as creation of relations of *regard* is also an aim in itself. They in turn can contribute to local identities and well-being. Relations of *regard* are likely to have special importance in local and organic food chains where *regard* may partly compensate the higher price and bigger work load as compared to more industrialized food chains.

Colin Sage (2003) sees personal acknowledgement and relations of *regard* underpinning the existence of the organic food network in south-west Ireland. Relations of *regard* may be involved in the inspiring planned cooperation between Bakkedalen farm and the local baker, Denmark, in collaborative planning of the bicycle route in Kluczbork, Poland, or in the contacts and direct sales between the Puumala day care centre kitchen and local organic producers in the Juva case in Finland. Besides common purposes and objects, relations of *regard* may fuel the collective action for enhancing ecological agriculture and local food systems.

Cooperation in local ecological food is promoted by *small initiatives and projects*. One starting point in many cases has been one or several organic farmers who somehow have to organize the selling of their products. For instance in Raseiniai, Lithuania, farmers have used new market forms such as e marketing and delivery to homes. A bicycle route in Kluczbork, Poland, meetings and seminars on Nørregaard farm in Denmark are other examples. In Juva, joint product development with a processor, institutional food services and researchers has taken place. Presentations in local shops, market place activities, excursions to other sites, farm-visit cooperation between schools and farms, and promotional events are additional examples of initiatives to enhance cooperation between producers and consumers. Social interaction influences consumer preferences as well as the general awareness about environmental and rural issues. One way to move forward is community supported agriculture (CSA) which is known in the USA (O'Hara and Stagl 2002).

The support group of Bakkedalen farm, Denmark, resembles it.

To conclude I would like to raise some questions for further studies. Based on these case studies the extent of locality of these chains and systems is not known. To what degree do the farms and processing enterprises sell their products locally or to more distant markets? It may even be that selling to wholesalers and centralized markets partly enable enterprises to engage in local food chains (see Sage 2003, 58).

There is not any one right model for all local organic and ecological food systems. Each case has its own history, nature and characteristics and has found its own solutions. It is not so important whether the food system is small or large – rather, it is crucial that the parts of the system fit and function well together. The different types of local food systems, their suitable scales and functioning require further analysis.

In this publication of case descriptions the issue of the researchers' role in studying and promoting cooperation in food systems has only been touched slightly. Is it the role of an activist or of an objective scientist? Should researchers be outsiders or insiders of the food system, or perhaps both? (See Engeström and Miettinen 1999; Alrøe and Kristensen 2002.) Moreover, what are the suitable forms of facilitation and researchers' interaction with practitioners to enhance mutual learning? What are the bases of developmental research? What is the role of rural policy and projects in developing local and ecological food chains? These questions remain to be studied and the findings documented. The BERAS project also aims at enhancing international cooperation between researchers and others interested in local and organic food. The past, present and future initiatives described in this publication hopefully give ideas and inspiration for cooperation within food systems, within multidisciplinary research, and between them.

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